

תורת אביגדור

הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha

Adapted from his Tapes, Sforim and Writings of Talmidim

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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת ויגש

A NATION WITH NO KING

Anyone with even a superficial knowledge of the history of our people, will know that up until the times of Shaul Hamelech there were no kings who ruled over the Jewish nation. Although the Torah (Devarim 17:14) allowed for such a scenario, for the first four centuries in Eretz Yisroel nobody even thought about appointing a king. The Am Yisroel didn't have any kings lording over the people.

Now, the superficial observers, like Graetz and the other ignorant *apikorsim*, tried to claim that it was because we were a backwards people, a primitive tribal family. But that's *sheker v'kazav*! It was only because we were the *best* of all peoples, a nation that recognized that *Hashem Melech*, that only Hakodosh Boruch Hu is our king, that's why we were able to succeed at the glorious experiment of self-government, without a king of flesh and blood sitting on a throne. And that's why Shmuel Hanavi disapproved so severely of the people's desire for a king: "But the L-rd your G-d is your king!" said Shmuel (Shmuel I 12:12). And even Hashem was angered and He considered their request for a king as if they had rejected Him (ibid. 8:7).

DON'T RUN FOR OFFICE!

The fact is that the Am Yisroel could have easily appointed a king as soon as they came into the land. Only that nobody was willing to accept the crown; nobody wanted the job. When it was offered, it was always refused. It was a principle of the Jewish nation - nobody ran for office! You shouldn't be a man who seeks glory. "To lord over my fellow Jews as a leader?!" It was unheard of. The lust for power was always considered a most despicable trait of character. The nation as a whole, as well as each individual, despised anyone who would even show a faint thirst for power.

You remember when the people came to Gideon? Now, Gideon was a great war hero who saved the Am Yisroel from their enemies. And when the people came to him and said "Be our king," he should have jumped at the opportunity for greatness - after all, the people were begging him. But you know what Gideon said? He said: "How could I be your king? Why would I raise myself above you? Hashem is your King! (Shoftim 8:23). This was not an idle rejoinder; it was meant literally. That's how it used to be; the Am Yisroel actually knew that *Hashem is the king!* It wasn't just a form of speech.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

And even when the nation, in a moment of weakness and fear of the nations around them finally demanded a king, there were no candidates for the job. You didn't have people lining up like they do today fighting with each other to become president. And when Shaul was chosen, he was nowhere to be found. הנה הוא - "And he was hiding among the barrels" (Shmuel 1 10:22). They went searching for him and found him in a cellar, his legs sticking out from among barrels, where he had hidden himself to escape the glory of kingship. They had to drag him out from behind the barrels by his legs to become the king. That was our first king!

And this was the foundation of this great family from its inception. Avraham Avinu said אנכי עפר ואפר - "I am dust and ashes" (Bereishis 18:27). "I am nothing," said Avraham. And he wasn't just saying it, like the man who says אני הקטן בעניות דעתי,

and really he's thinking **אני הגדול בעשירות דעתי**. No, Avraham meant it when he said it. He really felt it.

And Yitzchok was always a man of humility. And Yaakov too was humble all the time. We know this from all of the stories of our Avos. And the sons of Yaakov, the twelve *sh'vatim*, were raised on this principle of humility. It was fed to them in their mother's milk. That was always the principle of this noble family and they abhorred any man who entertained ambitions of being a king, a leader over others.

LITTLE YOSSELEH'S GRAND DREAMS

And then all of a sudden, in this atmosphere of *anivus*, in the humble environment of this great family, the brothers saw a danger developing. Here is Yosef, little Yosseleh, the youngest of them, and he's dreaming grand dreams. He's dreaming of greatness, of wielding total control over the family. Their little brother was having hallucinations of being the one in charge.

We know that a dream comes at night from one's thoughts during the day. **אמר רבי יונתן אין מראין לו לאדם אלא מהרהורי לבו** - "In a man's dreams, he is shown only that which his heart thinks about" (Brachos 55b). If you think about something too much during the day, then that's the dream that will come to you at night. And so the brothers understood that Yosef's dreams were the result of his constant thoughts of seizing power. "So what's this that he's dreaming, that we should all bow down to him?" they said. "It means he's walking around all day with ideas, with dreams of grandeur."

And to the righteous brothers, Yosef's desires were a terrible and fateful step in the wrong direction. He was veering from the straight path of simplicity and humility that the *Avos* had set down for them. Under their noses was developing a peril to the future of this great and holy nation. A viper was lurking among them.

THE REASON FOR THE BROTHERS' HATRED

ויסיפו עוד שנוא אותו על חלומותיו ועל דבריו - "And they hated him even more because of his dreams *and because of his words*" (ibid. 37:8). They hated him not only "because of his dreams" but also "because of his words." He wasn't just dreaming. He believed

in it! Here he is calling the whole family together to tell them his dreams. Yosef wasn't playing around. He wasn't calling his brothers together just to waste time; he meant business. He was putting his family on notice - "This is what's going to be, like it or not!" And so וישנאו אותו, they hated him. "What's he opening his big mouth for? What's the purpose of him telling us his dreams?! Because he believes them! Otherwise he wouldn't tell them to us. He's letting us know what's going to be. Little Yosseleh is taking his daytime fantasies, his ambitions of grandeur, and imagining them as some sort of prophecy. It's bad enough that his ambitions for power are so ingrained in his psyche that they're causing such dreams, but he's actually imagining himself to be a prophet."

And to make matters worse their little brother was getting involved in their private business, sticking his nose where it didn't belong. He scrutinized his brothers' every move and reported everything to his father. He would come to Yaakov and give certain reports about their behavior - he found certain flaws in his brothers which he constantly reported to Yaakov who would then reprimand them. And so the brothers suspected that Yosef was building up a case for himself, so that someday he should be able to take over the leadership of the family.

THE ROMAN ELECTIONS IN CANAAN

Now, how could a younger brother ever hope to gain control over his older brothers? When a youngest brother wanted to take over the leadership, it didn't happen so easily. There was only one way, and that was the way of "the Roman elections". You know how they elected a new emperor in Rome, don't you? By the stiletto. You have to get rid of the older brothers first. That's what they used to do in the ancient times. In ancient times, among the nations, whenever a younger brother gained power, his first business was to get rid of the older siblings. It still happens that way in some countries to this day. And that was the only option available for this ambitious upstart. He would have to slaughter his older brothers, and that way he'd wrest control and rule.

And so the brothers were afraid; such an ambitious fellow, an upstart, he would slaughter them eventually! And it's all wrapped up in the mantle of piety: "He thinks he's the *meshgiach*

of the family and he claims he's a *navi* as well! A *navi sheker* is what he is, a false prophet! And he's spending his days informing on us to our father just to aggrandize himself, to advance himself in our father's eyes. This kid is one dangerous fellow.

THE BROTHERS SET THEIR ALARM CLOCKS

“What's going to happen to us? So before he does away with us, our only option is get rid of him. We have to nip this threat in the bud.” **הבא להרגך השכם להורגו** (Sanhedrin 72a). If someone is coming to kill you, you don't wait till he's already standing on top of you to begin defending yourself - you set your alarm for early in the morning, before he gets up, and you kill him first! They weren't about to sit back like *lemeluch* and let this little schemer make his dreams come true - over their dead bodies. And so they concluded that it was a *mitzvah* to kill him.

Now, they weren't people who would make a snap judgement on somebody, especially a brother. And especially to kill! It was done with the utmost gravity. They sat and thought about it for a long time. The Torah doesn't tell us all the details, all the conversations and discussions they had. They sat and pondered and debated for many months. And they came to the sober conclusion that this wasn't mere sibling rivalry; it was self-preservation, *pikuach nefesh*. And therefore, with heavy hearts, they decided that it was their duty, no matter how difficult it would be, to get rid of him.

CHANGE OF PLANS

Only that finally, in the last moments, they weakened slightly in their resolve, and they didn't carry out his deserved punishment. It's not easy to rid the world of a *rasha* when that *rasha* is your own flesh and blood.

And therefore, despite their absolute conviction that Yosef was a dangerous megalomaniac who would do whatever possible to gain power, they decided that they could avert the danger they faced by selling him as a slave instead of killing him. In the ancient times a slave wasn't somebody who could harbor any grand ambitions. There were no abolitionists in those days to stir up trouble, and therefore slavery was forever. And therefore, once he would be sold into slavery and carried out of the country, it's

finished. That would forever end his grand plans. And that would put an end the danger that Yosef posed to his family.

Now we have to know that Yosef's brothers felt no regret about what they had done. No regret at all. They were convinced that what they had done was the proper procedure. They were more sure of themselves than we could ever be. In fact they thought that executing Yosef was what really they should have done. They were absolutely convinced that they did what had to be done and they had no regrets *at all*.

BACK TO OUR PARSHA...

And now our *parsha* takes us twenty-two years after the sale of Yosef, and we are standing in fear with the brothers as they bow in submission before the viceroy in the Egyptian palace. Now, when they came to the *mishneh lamelech*, a very harsh man who was in charge of selling grain to the foreigners, he was making all sorts of demands on them. He was threatening them and they were quaking. And suddenly he opens up his mouth and out came a lightning bolt - shocking words that floored them: **אני יוסף** - "I am Yosef!" (Vayigash 45:3). He said in *lashon kodesh*, "*Ani Yosef.*"

It was their little brother *Yosseleh*, and now he was sitting on the throne of the king. It had all come true! All of a sudden they discovered in a flash that Yosef was a *navi*, chosen by Hakodosh Boruch Hu. They had just bowed down to him twice just like he had prophesied once upon a time. And back then they had laughed at him. "Should we come and bow down to you?!" they said. They had degraded him! And now they saw it had all come true.

THEY HAD BEEN WRONG ALL ALONG

At the moment when they heard this man sitting on the throne say the words **אני יוסף**, they stood there stunned and terrified. They were dumbfounded. He knocked them over! **ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי נבהלו מפניו** - "His brothers were not able to answer him, because they were flabbergasted in his presence" (ibid.). They were terrified not only because they realized that the boy they had sold into slavery was now the vice-regent of Egypt and that their lives were in danger, but even more so because *it*

was now revealed to them that they had been living in error, that they had been wrong all along.

There had not even been a trace of doubt in their minds in their dealing with the danger of Yosef. The brothers had felt entirely justified. Yosef constantly spoke to his father about them, telling him whatever wicked things he could imagine in order to encourage his dreams of overthrowing the family. He was a *navi sheker*, he spoke *lashon harah* against them, and was plotting to get rid of them. And this was not just a weak justification of a deed done long ago. It was twenty-two years of justifications! Twenty-two years of building edifice upon edifice, story upon story, of justifications. For years they had reinforced their already pure arguments. They purified their *svaros* more and more.

Not that their decision of how to deal with the danger of Yosef needed any reinforcing, but that's the way of a person. He's always justifying himself. You know that when you get into a fight with your wife, so the first hour you might feel bad about it. Something at least; a tinge of regret. An hour later, as you go off to work, you feel that you're right. Two hours later, you're surely right! The more time passes, the more right you become. And the wife is doing the same thing at home. She knew she was right from the beginning! Because that's the way of a human being; always justifying oneself. It's human nature.

THE SKYSCRAPER COMES CRASHING DOWN

And so Yosef's brothers were human as well. And they were building up, and reinforcing themselves since the last time they had seen Yosef, as they were lowering him into the pit. And it was some building by this time! It was a skyscraper of righteousness. And now all of a sudden it came crashing down and the brothers now realized that they had deceived themselves. They saw now that the true reason for their opposition to their little brother was not the big edifice that they had constructed, the justification of self-defense to rescue themselves from his sinister plans. No, it was *nothing but jealousy*. ויקנאו בו אחיו, that's what it was. Despite all of the *lomdus*, all of their justifications, despite all of the wise understanding of these *tzadikim*, what was the real reason? The *possuk* tells us: ויקנאו בו אחיו - *they were jealous of him!* Until now, the brothers would have laughed at you had you told

them that. They would never admit to such a thing. "We're jealous?! And because we're jealous we're going to harm a brother?! *Chas v'shalom!* It wouldn't enter our minds!" But Hakodosh Boruch Hu says to them, "Let me tell you what was really doing in your heads: ויקנאו בו אחיו. Because Hashem was digging into their minds. Just because you don't bother to dig, you think Hashem won't? Hakodosh Boruch Hu looked deep into their consciousness and saw that it was jealousy.

And now, in this single moment of clarity, revealed to them as well. At that moment, overwhelmed with shock and regret, they were suddenly left naked of all of their justifications of so many years. It all collapsed into dust. Like a punch in the face the words "*Ani Yosef*" hit them. The brothers realized that all of their judgements and all of their decisions were colored not with righteous indignation, but with simple jealousy. Their upstart younger brother, strutting around, wearing the new suit his father gave him, caused them to be jealous of him, *and it was that kinah that really caused them to make their decisions.*

THE TERRIFYING LESSON OF OUR PARSHA

The words "*Ani Yosef*" are truly terrifying words, only that we don't think. We read them with our thick heads, and we don't absorb the intended lesson. We're completely oblivious. But what did Chazal say when they came to this *possuk*? They tell us the following: אמר אבא כהן ברדלא: או לנו מיום הדין או לנו מיום התוכחה - "Abba Cohen Bardala said: Woe is to us on the Great Day of Judgment in the Next World! Alas to us on the Great Day of Rebuke!" (Bereishis Rabbah 93:10). Abba Cohen Bardala thought about this encounter in the palace between Yosef and his brothers and he internalized a great fear of the *Yom Hadin* that will come after death. From our story here, from the few words that Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef!" Abba Cohen Bardala became a new person.

And the *medrash* continues: ומה יוסף הצדיק שהיה בשר ודם שהוכיח את אחיו לא יכלו לעמוד בתוכחתו, הקדוש ברוך הוא שהוא דיין ובעל דין ויושב על כסא דין ודין כל אחד ואחד על אחת כמה וכמה שאין כל בשר ודם יכולים לעמוד לפניו. When Yosef, who was merely flesh and blood, rebuked his brothers, they couldn't withstand his rebuke. In a flash of understanding, all the buildings that they had erected,

strong buildings of justification overlaid with further justification, justifying themselves and condemning Yosef, collapsed into nothing. And they stood there in fear and terror before a *basar v'dam*.

ALL MEN ARE BLIND!

You know that the *shevatim* were great men. בני יעקב בחיריו, the sons of Yaakov, were Hashem's chosen ones (Tehillim 105:6). But even the greatest men will make errors about themselves. Because no matter how great you are, you will always be blind to your own faults. It's impossible to know your own faults, to really know how wrong you are. And this tremendous lesson, that even the most righteous of men must suspect their actions and their motives all the time, stands out as one of the great teachings of Hashem's Torah.

Just for this lesson alone, for what we will speak about now, the entire episode of Yosef and his brothers deserved to take place. Because if the בני בחיריו, the choicest of men, could make errors about themselves, and then find themselves standing dumbfounded and terrified before the throne of a king - a king of flesh and blood - then we surely should be terrified about what is awaiting us.

THE GREAT DAY IS COMING

So can you even begin to imagine the terror that will overcome you on that day when you will have to stand before the real King?! And that's what the *medrash* says: לנשיבוא הקדוש ברוך - "And on that day when Hashem comes to rebuke each one of us for a lifetime of errors and failings, all the more so will we stand before Him dumbstruck with terror." One should shudder when he reads these words because the *medrash* is talking to us. Me and you. Not the one sitting next to you. Not your neighbor, not your wife. You, *you!* The "perfect" you! All your life you are saying, at least you're thinking, "I am right. I am right and I am right!" And now the *medrash* comes along and says, "No, you're wrong!"

And that's what Rav Abba Cohen Bardala is telling us; that one day - and no matter how much we avoid thinking about it, it won't help - one day it will happen to us too. Most people imagine that they will live forever. Of course, you know you

won't but you push the thought of the deathbed far enough way so that you don't think about it much. Deep down you're hoping that you'll be here for at least five thousand years. But sooner or later the day *is* going to come. And on that great day of judgment, we will discover that we have deceived ourselves all our lives.

I'm not even talking now about specific sins, or things that you didn't pay attention to, things that you forgot or ignored. I'm talking about something much more serious. I'm talking about your whole *derech chaim*, your whole way in life. Your attitudes, your ideals, your mind, your thoughts, your dealings with everyone, and most important, your dealings with Hashem.

THE EXPERT IS LIMITED

"Every way of man is right in his eyes" (Mishlei 21:2). In his own eyes! But really everyone is full of character flaws. Everyone is stumbling, making mistakes, even grievous errors, and yet they believe that they are absolutely sound in their judgement. כל הנגעים אדם רואה חוץ מנגעי עצמו - "A man can see all the blemishes, except his own" (Nega'im 2:5). Here's a man who is an expert in seeing faults in other people. It's a career of his. He's tells people what's wrong with them! But still, his own faults he doesn't see. Because a man is blind to his own faults. חוץ מנגעי עצמו.

Like myself; I'll teach people *mussar*, but what about me? What about my own faults? Am I concentrating on my own *nega'im*, my own faults? "Oh yes," I'll say, "I do, I do." A *nechtigeh tug!* If I can't see my own faults, how could I concentrate on them?! A person might sense something vague. A little something, a tiny little crack in his perfect self, but it's so small. He thinks it's almost nothing at all. And that's such a fatal mistake that it will haunt you forever and ever when you find out about it in the Next World - when all you will feel is the horrible feeling of regret because it will be too late to change.

THE RIGHTEOUS CONFESSION

And even though on Yom Kippur you'll come and you'll say "I sinned and I sinned," I'll tell you what's *really* going on. The same thing that happened by Yosef's brothers. The brothers said מה נצטרק - "With what could we justify ourselves?! We have no justification for what we did." They were beating their chests,

saying **מה נצטרך**, “How could we justify ourselves?” And the *Gemara* (Shabbos 106a) says that from here we learn **לשון נוסריקון**, that's **ראשי תיבות**. You look at the each letter on its own and you can see what was really doing in the minds of the brothers. The **נ** means **נקיים אנחנו**, we are righteous innocent people. They said **מה נצטרך** but they were thinking **נקיים אנחנו**. And the **צ** means **צדיקים אנחנו**. They said “*Ay yah yay, אשמנו*” but they were thinking **צדיקים אנחנו**. The **ד** means **דכים אנחנו**, we are pure. All the letters of **נצטרך**, instead of a *viduy* for sins, are actually self-glorification.

Now, they weren't thinking these words. No, they meant the *viduy* sincerely. “Hashem has found our sin,” they said. “We did something wrong when we sold our brother!” **מה נצטרך** - “We can't justify ourselves.” But that was with their mouths, and even the surface of their hearts. But *underneath the surface*, even among the greatest, is **נקיים אנחנו צדיקים אנחנו טהורים אנחנו דכים אנחנו קדושים אנחנו**. That's **נצטרך**. That's what lies behind the *viduy*.

And that's what happens on Yom Kippur. You're going to get up, and you'll say **אשמנו בגדנו גולנו**, and you'll feel better and better each time you hit your heart. “This doesn't apply to me, and I never did this and I never did that. And even if I did, it was a faint sin, nothing really wrong. And now I'm volunteering to do *teshuva!*” You have a heart of gold, but you're doing it anyhow. You're volunteering to blame yourself, you think. And Hakodosh Boruch Hu should recognize your righteousness! That's what you're thinking.

THE MOST FEARFUL WORDS IN THE TORAH

But that terrible day of dread is coming, when suddenly you will have to appear before the throne of not just a nothing king of Egypt, but before the the Great Judge Himself, Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And He will say two words to us, just two words: **אני השם**! And when we hear those terrifying words, all of our buildings that we constructed all our lives, our life-long justifications, will collapse into nothing. Nothing! And the Great Day of Rebuke will become the Great Day of Regret.

That's why I tell people that these words “*Ani Yosef,*” are the most fearful words in the entire Torah. It's a *possuk* that should fill every thinking man with apprehension. Because on the Great Day of Judgement we too will discover that we have been living

in error. I'm not saying it's *all* error, but everyone is deceiving themselves to a very, very great extent. And on the Day of Judgement the truth will be revealed before our horrified eyes, and we will not have a tongue to answer.

"YOU'RE ALL SICK!"

You know, Rav Yisroel Salanter said that the one thing that is unknowable to man is what Hashem thinks of him. That's a very scary statement because once you're standing in front of Hashem on that Great Day of Judgement, that's all that's going to matter to you - that's all you're going to care about. The *gemara* (Pesachim 154b) states that one of the things that are *מכוסה מעיניו של אדם*, hidden from the eyes of a person, is *omek hadin*, the depth and the profundity of judgement. And Rashi adds over there that *רובם טועים בו*, most people are mistaken about this.

Most people! Very learned people, *tzadikim*, the people sitting here - unless we are willing to dig into our consciences, like we say *נחפשה דרכינו*, you have to dig, *ונחקורה* - and search, unless we do that, we're going to deceive ourselves.

The problem is that we're all coming into this place from the gentile street. We're living in a gentile world, with gentile ideas and gentile attitudes. And that means that we're *not* well. What is America? It's a country of *leitzanus*, of laughter, laughing at every good thing. Once, America was a decent country - I can't say it was ever moral but it was a thousand times better than it is today. Today it's all *leitzanus!* Everything important is laughed at, and every foolish idea is made "holy." The world today is a world of *gashmiyus*, of *arayos*, of *chutzpah* and *middos ra'os*. And we're living among them so there's no question that everybody walks into this room with something wrong with them. And I'm being generous when I say that. And there are no exceptions. It doesn't matter how much you learn *mussar*, it doesn't matter how long your beard is, you're all sick as could be. Everybody!

WE NEED MORE AWARENESS OF HASHEM

Everyone is deceived about his own character flaws, his *middos*. I'm dealing with people all day long, and it's remarkable how blind people are to their own faults. Every divorced couple, every fight between neighbors, there's always the same story. He believes she is evil, and she says he's a *rasha*, he says his neighbor

is a *ganav*, and his neighbor says that he's a *ka'asan*. His boss is wicked and his employee is a lazy bum. That's all I hear! And probably they're all right. Because people are sick with *middos ra'os* and nobody is doing anything about it.

And it's not only *middos*. It's much more than that. People are living superficial lives - I'm talking about the Orthodox now. We're all the same today; life has settled down into a meaningless stereotype of what the gentiles do. There's a terrible lack of Awareness of Hashem in the world today. We're just plodding our way through life, living for three meals a day, without realizing that we're here only to make progress!

READING THE SIDDIR AND OPENING THE ARK

Fear of Hashem doesn't mean superficial acts of piety. Now, when someone takes on such actions, we're not always going to discourage him, but we can't let you confuse yourselves into thinking that you're a *yarei shamayim*. Many people here are deceiving themselves about what they're here in this world to accomplish. Here's a man I know. His thing is that he says every word in the siddur from cover to cover. That's it; he doesn't miss a word. You won't learn about the siddur, about all the great ideals and attitudes you can achieve from the siddur, by saying every word. You will only learn about the siddur if you go to someone who will teach you how to daven.

Another man read in a pamphlet of *segulos* that the way to open the *sha'arei harachamim* is if you open up the *aron kodesh*. So every time without fail, he is there ready to open up *aron kodesh*. *Am ha'aretz!* He wears a *bekesha* and he's demanding that he get *pesicha* because he read somewhere that if you open up the *aron kodesh* your wife will have an easy pregnancy. I'm not discouraging this practice but you have to understand how superficial it is. There are a thousand ways to open up the gates of mercy, and one of them is *not* by opening the *aron kodesh*. Now I have nothing against opening the *aron kodesh*. Be my guest! But the sickness is when people think that *this is it!*

THE BEHEIMA AND THE MAGICIAN

And here's a man who took five hundred dollars and gave it to a *mekubal* and he got a "blessed stone" in return. What a waste of money! Five hundred dollars, and what he got was a

rhinestone that was made in a ladies jewelry shop for a few dollars, and a *bracha*. He's an *am haaretz*, a *beheima*. His whole way in life is a sickness that has to be healed.

He should have asked me; I would have told him to go to a *talmid chochom*, not a *mekubal* magician, a man who does tricks. You should pick yourself up, walk across the street and tell your problem to the *Rosh Yeshiva* at the *Mir*. Tell him the problem and do whatever he says. You could give ten dollars and ask him to pray for you. He certainly would daven for you - and he wouldn't take the ten dollar bill either. When he davens next, he will have you and your problem in mind, and he'll pray for you. If you have money to give, give it to the yeshiva; give them five hundred dollars and they would love you at the Yeshiva. Yes, people are sick when it comes to spending money. And there are worse things than *mekubalim*. Today, money is being flushed down the toilet all the time because people don't know what life is for.

READ THE GUIDE BOOKS!

Of course, you don't know the way to walk in life! Because you haven't studied the guide books. Did you read Chovos Halevavos from cover to cover many times? Did you read Sha'arei Teshuva many times from cover to cover? Did you learn Mesillas Yesharim from beginning to end *many times*? Did you learn Rav Saadia Gaon? Did you learn the Kuzari? The Vilna Gaon says, "Do not forsake the Levi" - that's Rabbi Yehuda Halevi. Did you learn the Rambam's Hilchos Teshuva, Hilchos Dei'os, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah? Maybe you noshed a little bit here and there, but that's not going to give you guidance.

And I'll tell you something else - even people who are guiding others haven't learned these *seforim*. And if you haven't, what right do you have to give people advice? There are people who like to give advice. What right do you have to give advice? What right do you have to give your own family advice, to give yourself advice? It's all because you're deceiving yourself.

FINALLY, SOME GOOD ADVICE

Now, the question that we have to ask ourselves is if we're so sick and we can never trust ourselves at all, then what are we left with? Are we going to walk in darkness, fooling ourselves until it is too late to rectify our errors? What then is the *derech*

chaim, the path of life that leads towards perfection of ourselves, and towards life in the Next World?

And for that we turn to the valuable treasury that we call *Mishlei*. Now, Shlomo Hamelech doesn't need any *haskamah* from me, but it's important for you to know that *Mishlei* is a repository for all precious things. All good advice, all of the wise counsel for living successfully is found in *Mishlei*.

And among the main teachings in *Mishlei*, there is one idea that is reiterated constantly. It occupies a major place among the doctrines of *Mishlei*. And that is the teaching of criticism, the teaching of rebuke. Again and again, Shlomo Hamelech reiterates how important it is to have someone who criticizes you.

NOT MUSSAR - STINGING MUSSAR

Listen to these words from the wisest of all men: דרך חיים מוסר, תוכחות מוסר, the way of life is *the rebukes of instruction*. It doesn't say דרך חיים מוסר, the way of life is *mussar*. That would mean, you open up a *mussar sefer*, and you learn it, and of course you take it in the sense that's most pleasing to you. You see in it a reflection of all your good things. Sometimes you come across something that seems to be in contradiction to your behavior, so you don't spend too much time on it, and you go on further. But frequently you find that you agree with him - the good things. "That's right, that's right," you're thinking, "because that's me"

Now, of course, a person who studies *mussar*, if he studies *mussar* the way it's supposed to be studied, will also be able to find the flaws in himself. But most people study *mussar*, and see just the flaws of others. This friend has this fault and this neighbor that fault. He sees his whole neighborhood in the *mussar sefer* - except for himself. Many people enjoy learning *mussar* for the same reason they used to enjoy it when the *maggid* came to town and spoke in the shul - he was lambasting the people and they loved it. Why? Because each one is thinking, "Oh, that's the other fellow he's speaking about. He means my neighbor; sure, sure, I agree." Each one pointed to the other one.

ON MAGGIDIM AND SPEAKERS

But at least in those days there was a market for such merchandise, such criticism. That went out of style though, and

now *maggidim* have been replaced by “speakers.” “Speakers” speak in general, they don't criticize. They speak in general. And we have to speak about that subject because it's a big problem.

You've justified your behavior, your attitudes, and your thinking, so much, and so many times, that you actually think that there is nothing wrong - everything is fine with you. And therefore, you'd better get busy *unjustifying* yourself while you're still breathing in this world, before it's too late. And that's why *mussar* is not sufficient. Shlomo didn't say *mussar*; he said תוכחות מוסר! “The way of life is *rebukes of mussar*.”

MILLER'S CLINIC AND PHARMACY

You must hear what's wrong about yourself! At least you can come here - if you find other places where you'll hear the truth, that's good also - and you can hear it somewhat, some rebukes of *mussar*. At least in general terms, general ideas, you'll hear important ideas. Like we said earlier, we listened to Abba Cohen Bardala as he warned us about the great day of judgment that we all have to prepare for. That's something everyone should be thinking about.

Now, you don't have to obey me. You can wait until that great day of judgment to hear the truth, if you wish. But if you're here already, I'll tell you anyhow. I think I'm the oldest one here, so I'll take the privilege of saying the following. When people come in here, I consider it a sort of dispensary, a pharmacy clinic. Everyone comes in here sick. And if you're willing to stay in my shul here, you'll get healed - at least a little bit you'll get healed.

So when you come here to hear these lectures, you should come with humility. You should say, “My head is a *mish-mash*, a confusion. In my head I have all kinds of ideas, all kinds of *sheker*, from all kinds of places.” And here is one man who is *not afraid* to tell you the truth. And that's because I don't care what you think about me. It doesn't bother me in the least.

NO NEWSPAPER HASHKAFOS IN TORAS AVIGDOR

And therefore, you have to expect to hear things here that will be a rebuke to your way in life. You shouldn't expect to hear things that are merely an echo of the thoughts in your own head, or an echo of what you hear on the radio and that you see in the

newspapers. It won't even be an echo of things that you hear in many other shuls. Because I know that we all need תוכחות מוסר. So I walk around the room administering the medicine, the rebuke, that you need. A few drops here, something here. A prescription here and some vitamin pills here.

And I know that I'm sick too. I need somebody to cure me too. But I was fortunate. I was fortunate enough to spend years in Slobodka with the best doctors. And I stayed close to them and they told me the truth. They didn't hold back, and that helped to cure me a little bit.

LISTEN TO CRITICISM!

Now actually you don't have to wait for me because you're hearing criticism all the time. And the surest way towards knowing yourself, is listening to others when they have what to say about you, when they are pointing at you, pointing out your faults. If you want to really be a success, you're going to have to be willing to listen to people who open their mouth to you. It might even be an off hand comment from a stranger who passes by you on the street. Seventy years ago a homeless bum told me something, he criticized me about a detail of my behavior - I'm not going to tell you what - and to this day I still remember his every word. And I'm a better man because of it.

It might be from your boss, or your neighbor, a fellow in your office. It might be a teacher or the man behind the counter in the store. And even though that person is not trying to help you in your *avodas Hashem*. That black man who criticised me wasn't trying to prepare me for *Olam Habah*. Not at all. But I took advantage of it. It could be that this person is just annoyed at you and he has a big mouth. Maybe his wife yelled at him before he walked out the door so he's in a bad mood. And so. your first reaction will always be to defend yourself; it's natural. תוכחות מוסר stings! Nobody likes to be told that there's something wrong with them. So right away all the excuses are already pouring out of your mind. Even if you don't say anything, you're thinking, "Who is this person telling me this or that?! He doesn't know my business!"

YOUR MEAN NEIGHBOR IS A MALACH

No, don't say that. Instead, listen to the words of Dovid Hamelech עלי מרעים תשמענה אזני: - "When the wicked rise

up against me, let my ears hear of their downfall” (Tehillim 92:12). Rav Yisroel Salanter explained it this way: “When the מרעים – those who want to say bad about me, those who want to criticize me and make me look bad, when they stand up against me, let my ears hear; let my ears hear their critique.” Not like people think today, that if someone criticizes you then he’s already your enemy. No! That’s your best friend. That’s the one to love and listen to, because that’s the person who’s going to bring you to *Olam Habah*.

Rabeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuva 2:11) says that. He says that anybody who comes along and criticizes you, he’s a מלאך המוכיח from Hashem. You hear that?! And here you thought that your neighbor criticizing you is your enemy, and Rabeinu Yonah comes along and tells you that he’s a *malach* from Hashem! What that means is that anybody who comes along in this world and says something to you of *mussar*, of rebuke, something that could be useful for you to hear, he’s called a *malach*. So now you’ll have a different sort of respect for that bum who told you off last week. You’ll utilize him because he’s being sent *min hashamayim* as an opportunity to become better. It’s a homeless *malach Elokim!*

THE WIFE BUSTS THE BALLON

I must tell you that a wife is an excellent opportunity for hearing the truth about yourself. Oh yes, a critical wife is a glorious opportunity! When a wife criticises her husband, you should know that she is doing a very great thing. In the kollel, at work, in the synagogue, nobody is going to tell you too much about your sore points. Maybe they’re too polite. Or maybe you put on a good show in public. Nobody will criticize this “great” man! Who’s going to tell you the truth outside the home?! And after a while you begin to think, “Maybe I really am a good person after all.” But your wife knows the truth! Of course she does; she knows you better than anyone else. So this important man comes home from shul and his wife deflates him. She sticks a pin in his balloon and it bursts. And lucky is that man whose wife has a big mouth and tells him what she sees. That’s a tremendous achievement. It’s a *shleimus*, a perfection, to be put down to size once in a while.

Whenever someone is willing to give you suggestions or instructions, even rebuke that bites, you should open your ears to the *malach Hashem*. You should take it for yourself, and try to apply it and utilize it. You should squeeze out every last drop of perfection from the biting words. Even if your critic is not a hundred percent right, but something he's right about - a little bit at least you can accept. It's the most wonderful opportunity and therefore whatever it is, keep your ears open. Don't just instinctively reject the criticism; accept it, and use it to make yourself even greater.

LEARNING MUSSAR WITH A NEW ATTITUDE

Now, one of the most important ways of recognizing and rectifying your faults is learning *mussar*. If nobody is going to rebuke you, you have no choice but to find the rebuke on your own. And the *seforim* are full of rebuke. Only that nobody is listening. Here's a man who curls up on the couch with a newspaper. A full hour every week with a newspaper! Magazines, novels; the *machlah* of wasting time with garbage is widespread today. I'm talking now to men and women, boys and girls. There's no time for *mussar*, no time for perfection of character, because people are busy with *kol minei* garbage.

And even if you learn the *seforim*, you must know *how* to learn. Because if you're just reading the words, then very little actually seeps into the recesses of your mind, into your *neshama*. You know that most people have an attitude when they're learning Torah, that they're trying to get *yedios*, to absorb information. They look at it as knowledge; sometimes they'll even repeat the words frequently with facility to show that they know it well. Sometimes they quote it; it sounds wonderful.

But that's not enough. The only solution is to approach these words of *mussar* with a completely new attitude. Every time you hear words of Torah, they can't remain merely a good *vort*, something nice to say over. That's almost worthless! When a person is looking to be a success in this world, he's always waiting for opportunities. So as soon as he hears something, as soon as he reads something, he says "That's me! That means me!" Because he was looking for it; he knows that this is what the *seforim* are for,

that they are talking to him. And therefore he utilizes it to become better.

MAYBE THE MUSSAR IS DIRECTED AT ME?

And that's what the Ramban says in his famous *igeres*, the letter he wrote to his son. וכאשר תקום מן הספר תחפש באשר למדת אם - "And when you rise from your study, think, "How can I apply this to my own life?" And it doesn't have to be only when you get up. You can be sitting down as well, and still learning, but after reading a paragraph, a line, or even a phrase, think about yourself; your own behavior. "Don't I do this all the time?! Maybe this *sefer* is talking to me! I'd better get busy." You have to apply it to your own life. You have to hear the words as תוכחות מוסר, rebuke directed at you, and begin applying it to your behavior.

When a person adds this motivation to his learning, that he wants to acquire those attitudes that the Torah teaches, that he wants to become that which the Torah says, so that person can gain a great deal. The *sifrei mussar* are full of advice, but you have to gain the attitude of learning them properly, the attitude of taking the words seriously with the intention of applying it to yourself. It's not such a simple attitude; it's not something that's easy to attain. It takes work; a person has to struggle to get that attitude that what's written in the *seforim* is a message that Hashem is speaking to him directly. But the person who does this will achieve a great deal. It's considered a perfection of character, a perfection of *seichel* for people to work on this, that when they hear or they read the words in the Torah, and in the *seforim*, they should feel as if it's a message being delivered directly to them and a good opportunity to be spurred on to becoming better.

THE METHOD OF TRANSFORMING YOUR LIFE

Now this you have to understand is something that is not usually done. People are willing to listen and to learn, they want to know what's written there, *but to become excited over it, to tremble at the various ideals and attitudes that have to be acquired*, that's not done in general. But the truth is that's what the Torah is for, and when people start learning *ma'amarei chazal* and *mussar seforim* with that attitude, it becomes a method of transforming their lives.

And our *chachomim* warned us about this: כל הלומד ואינו מקיים - Anyone who learns but he doesn't fulfill what he learns; because he's learning it only as a valuable and important subject that must be learned. It's worth knowing, but he doesn't take it to heart as a message to him, then, נח לו שנהפכה שלייתו על פניו ולא יצא לעולם - it would have been better had he never been born! That's what Chazal say! The whole Torah is given only for one purpose, in order that we should be transformed by the words of Hashem ourselves. And when people learn Torah and don't realize this purpose, so they came into the world for nothing. We came into the world to be transformed by the words of the Torah, and when we don't react to the teachings, the attitudes, the criticisms, the warnings, then it's better if we hadn't come into the world.

CRYING FROM READING CHUMASH

And that was always the policy of our great ones. They lived the words they learned, and were able to bring up the most precious pearls from the depths of the Torah. The Gemara in Chagiga (4b) says that when Rabbi Elazar was learning *chumash* and he would get to the posuk in this week's parsha, ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אותו כי נבהלו מפניו - "And the brothers were not able to answer him, for they stood in terror before him," he would cry profusely. He would cry like a baby. Now, Rabbi Elazar wasn't a weak fellow. He wasn't a milk toast, who cried for no reason. And he wasn't putting on a show. He cried because he was afraid! And that's because when he read the words he made sure they were speaking to him. He was listening! "One day that's going to be me! And I'm not going to be able answer the King, and I'll be standing in terror before Him."

Now before we end off, I must tell you, that even that is another important form of תוכחת מוסר that is available to everyone. It's a vital method of finding rebuke when there is nobody to tell you the truth. And that is the great opportunity of self-rebuke! Criticizing yourself! And if you are willing to make use of rebuking yourself, you can begin to see through the facade and justifications that you have built up.

TALK TO YOURSELF!

Here you are eating a piece of cake. You're enjoying yourself. But you don't even remember making a *bracha*. Of course

you made a *bracha*, but you mumbled it so quickly that you don't even remember it. That's gratitude?! That's thanking Hashem?! So instead of merely feeling a slight tinge of regret, open your mouth and give yourself rebuke. "Chaim'll! That's how you say thank you?! That's called a *bracha*?! What's going to be with you already?!"

And when you say a sharp word to your wife, or to a friend, don't spend your time justifying yourself. Spend the time rebuking yourself! "Chaim'll, is that how you speak to your wife?! You think Hashem is not watching and laughing at your justifications?! **ישב בשמים ישחק**. Do you really think that when you stand before Hashem, you'll be able to answer for this? You're going to melt away in terror on that day of fear."

TEAR DOWN THAT SKYSCRAPER

There is no end to the opportunities to rebuke yourself during the day. And trust me, there's enough to criticize there. If you pay attention to yourself carefully, you will find much to criticize. Now, don't do this in front of your wife. Don't talk to yourself in front of your wife, because she'll think the worst. And the same for a wife in the presence of a husband. But if you want to, you'll find more than enough time, and more than enough opportunity to give yourself **תוכחות מוסר**.

And the harsh sound of rebuke in this world will prepare you infinitesimally for the sweetness of the Next World. The more rebuke you hear while your heart is still beating in this world - whether it's rebuke from a neighbor, a *sefer* or from your own self - the more you'll be capable of tearing down the tall skyscraper of justifications that you have erected.

PREPARING TO MEET THE KING

The story of Yosef and his brothers is an enchanting story - even though I've gone through the Torah year after year, I can't help but to be caught up in the drama of Yosef and his brothers meeting in the palace. Each time I read that *possuk* when Yosef revealed himself, when he said "*Ani Yosef*," I feel a chill in my bones. It's such a remarkable story. But that's not why it's in the Torah. This incident is taught to us by the Torah as a model, a lesson for all men. It's a model for the behavior of everybody in this world. The Rambam in his *Moreh Nevuchim* says that. He

says that the stories we read in the Torah are much more than merely the stories they portray, more than just a history lesson. They are meant for us to apply in our lives. And this story of Yosef and his brothers is there to tell us that we are all deceiving ourselves - unless we will make the effort to analyze all of our actions, all of our deeds and words and thoughts, we will continue to live every facet of our lives with great tall edifices of self-justifications that will one day come crashing down.

And therefore our only hope is to tear down these tall edifices while we're still in this world. And as you do that, you'll become more and more perfect in the eyes of Hashem. And every little step forward that you make in this world, means that you will be less terrified when you finally, after a long life, enter into palace of the King of all Kings, and hear those terrifying words, **אני השם**.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

Is there a problem with taking children to concerts where *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos* will be singing kosher songs?

A:

I will tell you my private opinion. I don't think that children should become accustomed to unnecessary and superfluous things. Don't train your children to become accustomed to going places that cost money. They don't need it and you're ruining them in the process.

You can train them to take walks. They can take walks and get fresh air. They could play a little in the street with a ball and get some exercise, but don't take them to concerts and things like that. I don't believe in that at all. I don't believe in taking children to travel at all. Don't get them accustomed to luxuries. A child should be taught how to live a frugal life and to desire only what is necessary.

Today, people are feeding children all kinds of ideas – all kinds of wrong ideas. And people think it's normal. Even to send your daughter to Seminary in, let's say, Gateshead, I don't believe in it anymore. It's a very good place, Gateshead. But, send your daughter to Boro Park, to Yeshiva of Brooklyn. There are very good places here. And don't let your daughter travel to Eretz Yisroel either. A man approached me the other day. His daughter wants to go to Eretz Yisroel. She's a *frum* girl. He wants to know what I think about it. What does she have to go to Eretz Yisroel for?! It costs a lot of money to go to Eretz Yisroel. What does she have to go to Eretz Yisroel for?! An unmarried girl should waste money on going to Eretz Yisroel?! No, I don't believe in these things.

Teach your children to save their money. They'll need it someday. A bank account is better than travelling – a savings account in a bank. Teach them to save money for themselves. And you want to train them to spend money on unnecessary things?! No, I disapprove of that.

TAPE #E-217

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